

◆ STRESS AND STRANGENESS ◆



Before rushing off to begin the million little predeparture errands, take an overall look at what you feel must be done and at how much time you, your spouse, and children are willing and able to devote to it all. Next, you should prioritize the tasks to avoid simply running out of time or energy partway through your list. A good place to start is with the various Tickler Files contained in the *Overseasman's* resource folder.

Throughout the relocation process, keep in mind that the entire family is involved in the move and, therefore, everyone needs to be informed and active in the process of getting from here to there. Family communication, which contributes significantly to happy, successful overseas living should begin right at the start of your overall planning, for two important reasons.

First, all children, even young ones, need to be given some age-appropriate information about the move. Otherwise, their imaginations will provide their own explanations for the flurry of activity and the frequent but secretive adult discussions. It's wise to remember that kids develop radar just when you're hoping they're completely tuned out. It's also easier to deal with their legitimate concerns about a move without first having to dispel their erroneous perceptions and misguided conclusions based on their guesswork. While you don't have to involve them in every decision, you needn't wait until ev-

ery issue is fully resolved before discussing anything.

The second reason to explain the situation to your children is so you can put them to work. After reading through the Ticker Lists, you should tailor it to your own family's need. Then by whatever means your family uses or develops (parental decree, family council, etc.) define specific jobs and assign them to specific people, keeping in mind a few ground rules:

Every family member old enough to comprehend it should have some voice in the disposition (sale, storage or shipment) of his or her possessions. (You may live to regret sending "Fluffy Bear" in your express shipment without checking first!).

Be flexible in dividing up jobs with your spouse. Just because one of you is the service-member doesn't mean that he or she should automatically be responsible for all the bureaucracy-related tasks. Also be flexible after jobs are divided up. If something is not being done by the assigned person, talk it through. Pinpoint the problem and renegotiate the assignments.

The tasks given to children should not preclude their contact with friends, routine activities or very special events. Negotiation, compromise and trade-offs may be useful alternatives to ultimatums (for example, let your teenager invite friends to help clean the basement in exchange for free time rather than isolating your child to work, work, work). Leaving is hard enough without making preparations seem like punishment.

The kids most eager to help

will be those so young that they really can't accomplish much but who need to be included. Draw up a list of "jobs" in advance (maybe to pull from a job jar). In this way you'll have ideas ready when they demand to help (Example: packing a suitcase can be done over and over).

Build upon and encourage your children's interests and curiosity. A budding photographer can create an album about your home, community, friends, etc. Another could gather family history or stories. The MTV freak could be in charge of videotaping. Someone may be fascinated by some aspect of the new culture - crafts, history, geography or language - and can share his or her expanding knowledge with the entire family.

Enlist outside resources. There's nothing like the thought of going overseas to make you decide to begin all the home improvements you've avoided during your stay at your current location. Be realistic. You can hire someone to paint your basement, but only you can learn the new language, visit aging relatives, help your children learn about the new culture, or even stay at your own job longer. There are house cleaners, painters, repair people and even relocation services at the local Family Service Center just waiting for you to realize that perhaps you don't need to do all the drudgery yourselves.



THIS INFORMATION SHEET HAS BEEN ADAPTED FROM "MOVING YOUR FAMILY OVERSEAS," BY BARBARA LYON TOBIN WHICH SHE DEVELOPED FOR THE OVERSEAS BRIEFING CENTER OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE.

MORE ABOUT KIDS AND PCS MOVES

Typical Responses of Children



Children deal with many emotional issues when the family PCS's to a new home. They must "pull up roots" and become the new kid on the block. In order to best help your children, it is a good idea to first understand their behavior. Reactions will vary with age, but in general...

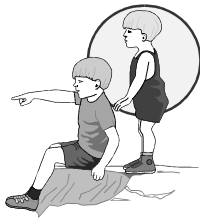


Infants and toddlers may:

- ♦ Be grumpy and fussy
- ♦ Reflect the family's tension
- ♦ Fear new places and people

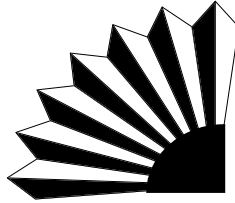
Pre-schoolers may:

- ♦ Be shy and fear anything new
- ♦ Be moody, quiet or loud
- ♦ Feel alone and misunderstood



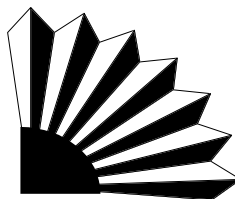
Teens may:

- ♦ Feel that the move will make them more dependent upon the family
- ♦ Feel out of control or frustrated
- ♦ Worry they won't be accepted



Children need to know the family is working together during this transition.

Support, communication and love are the three essentials for relocating families.



BEFORE THE MOVE

- ♦ Share with them your feelings of happiness or sadness. This gives the children permission to have feelings of their own.
- ♦ Allow children to hold on to a familiar possession during the move (toy or picture).
- ♦ Little ones need a lot of hugs and reassurance.

Help your child plan creative ways to stay in touch with friends and loved ones.



AFTER THE MOVE

- ♦ Organize the children's room first.
- ♦ Enroll your children in a sport or hobby as before the move.
- ♦ Stick to your regular routine as much as possible throughout the move.

Your children will be richer for the experience gained in moving, but they will need your emotional support to understand and manage their feelings and the stress of growing up in a "mobile" military lifestyle.



Contact your local Family Service Center Relocation Program for additional support.